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CHILE: Both campaign tempers and hopes are rising, but there is little prospect of a conclusive outcome from the congressional elections on 4 March.

Increasingly frequent and serious partisan clashes have caused half a dozen deaths and numerous injuries, some to opposition candidates. In reaction, Interior Minister General Prats has obtained commitments from all parties to reduce pre-election violence, but the efficacy of this "gentlemen's agreement" probably is limited.

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Both government and opposition are optimistic that they can retain or slightly better their present congressional representation, although no obvious trend is apparent. The point at issue is how effective Allende's Popular Unity(UP) forces are in limiting the opposing coalition's margin of victory. Because of complicated electoral laws and the affiliation of the 25 senators not up for re-election, the opposition needs at least 60 percent of the vote to retain its majorities in both the senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Despite Allende's continued popularity in certain sectors, widespread economic discontent gives the opposition a good chance and it is casting the election as a plebiscite. Allende and the UP, however, argue that a 40-percent vote for government candidates--indeed any amount above Allende's original 36.3 percent plurality--would constitute approval of his socialization program. The usually hardheaded Communists are predicting a UP vote of 42 percent or over.

Chilean politicians are uneasy over the uncertain effect of several new elements in this election. The electorate is at least 40 percent larger than in the last congressional elections, in 1969, and the franchise has been extended to illiterates and 18- to 21-year-olds. In addition, the combination of all but one small party into two competing slates will alter past effects of the complicated proportional system of vote computation.

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22 Feb 73

'Cd Intelligence Bulletin

3

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Another imponderable is the effects of military participation in the government and, more specifically, the reaction of General Prats and other military elements to the election result, which will have a major influence on post-electoral developments. Should military support for the government continue at its present level, Allende would emerge with the advantage, whatever the vote.

158

22 Feb 73

Central Intelligence Bulletin

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